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Book Reviews

SSC Pocket References

Published By: SSC Pocket Reference Books
Reviewed By: Kevin Savetz

This happens to me all the time: I'm in the middle of writing a C program, or tweaking an AUTOEXEC.BAT file, or editing a file with the "vi," or otherwise steeped in thought in front of the computer—then I hit "The Wall." This is a sort of inexplicable mental block: What's the format for outputting a number in hex? What's the syntax for the DOSSHELL command? How do I move a block of text? Further work stops until I can remember that bit of information or find the answer in a towering stack of manuals.

A series of pocket reference guides published by SSC will solve this problem. SSC publishes a series of tiny books and fold-out pamphlets—these reference guides give you just enough information to get back on track. Each guide—ranging from ten pages to about fifty—covers one program, operating system, or standard. Some of the guides are tutorials (for getting beginners up to speed) and others are shorter "reference" works.

For programmers, there are guides for ANSI C, C++, and Fortran 77. (Another good resource for programmers is the 29-page *Software Copyright Book*, which shows how to copyright source code and visual displays.) UNIX users can find guides on System V, the vi editor, GNU emacs, the Korn shell, and Linux. Other users will appreciate the RS-232 card (with information about serial communications) and the MS-DOS command summary.

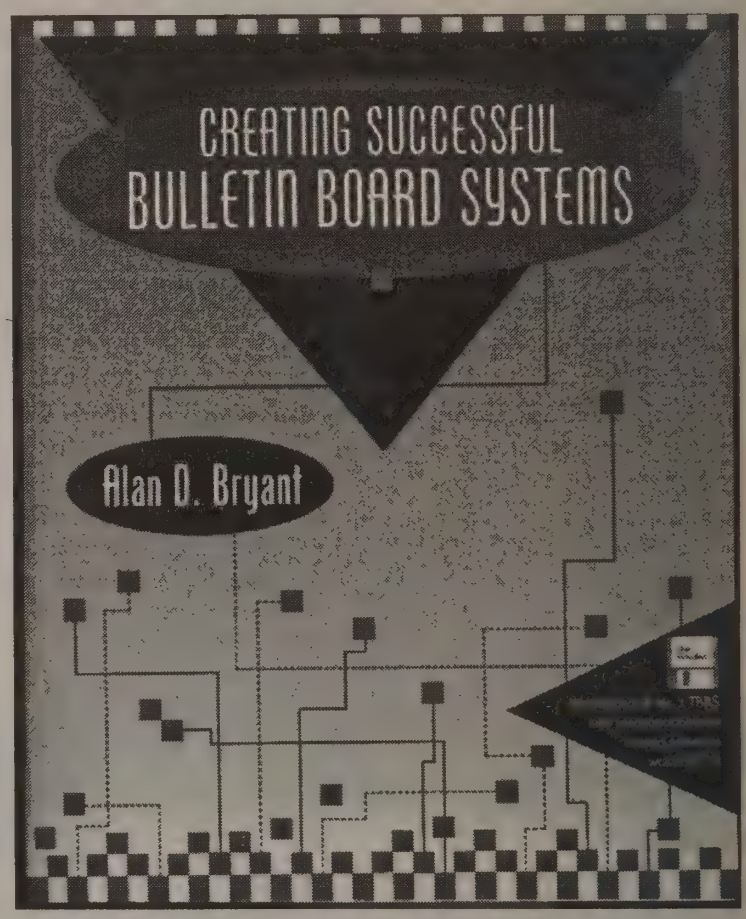
Prices vary depending on the size of the guide—the majority range from $3 to $10. These guides are small and complete, but will not replace the full manuals. (After all, they're not meant to.) They will, however, reduce the number of times you'll need to brave that leaning tower of tomes. (SSC, Inc., PO Box 55549, Seattle, WA 98155. 206/527-3385. Email: sales@ssc.com)

Creating Successful Bulletin Board Systems

Author: Alan D. Bryant
Published By: Addison-Wesley
List Price: $39.95
Reviewed By: Bill Gram-Reefer

According to the author of *Creating Successful Bulletin Board Systems*, Alan D. Bryant, there are an estimated 150,000 BBS operators representing a growth industry that expands 10 to 20% annually. But like restaurants that come and go each day, the spiraling BBS growth curve, pushed by entrepreneurs and hobbyists alike, comes complete with its own litany of false starts, zonko business plans, technical and legal problems, and poor capitalization. Noting these potential pitfalls, Bryant, director of marketing for eSoft Inc., has cobbled together a usable primer for the wanna-be system operator (sysop) that is worthy reading, too, for the experienced BBS operator.

Whether you're seeking fun or profit or both in your BBS, the chapters are designed to take the reader from the design, theme, and setup stage of creating a BBS, through to the finer points of technical requirements, expansion, billing methods, and day-to-day operation. Something of a *What Color Is Your Parachute?* how-to book, the many comparative tables throughout help the reader balance various options the author describes. The worksheets at the end of each chapter further help the reader analyze and organize. Insider tips speckled about provide sage warnings and technical explanations. A well-stocked appendix, glossary, and index round out this primer.



It comes complete with a clipped, two-line version of eSoft's popular TBBS software for IBM-PC and compatibles on a disk pasted on the inside-back cover. The program is upgradable to the full retail version for just $75. Not surprisingly, the DOS/TBBS background of the author limits the book's usefulness in areas of support for Macintosh-based systems that could be better served by scouring Bernard Aboba's *The Online User's Encyclopedia*, also published by Addison Wesley. But beyond these technical concerns, *Creating Successful Bulletin Board Systems* is loaded with enough platform-independent advice that it can be recommended to any reader.

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